

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SAM-01 IO-13

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9163

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USIA WASHDC

DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 5454

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SY

SUBJECT: PRIMIN KHULAYFAWI MOVES QUICKLY TO TAKE CHARGE OF
NEW CABINET

REF: DAMASCUS 5219

1. SUMMARY:

PRIME MINISTER KHUALYFAWI HAS INITIATED WELL-PUBLICIZED
ROUND OF MEETINGS WITH TOP SARG MINISTRY OFFICIALS, FOREIGN
VISITORS AND DIPLOMATIC CORPS TO UNDERLINE HIS IMAGE
OF ACTIVE AND REFORMIST PRIMIN. MOST SYRIANS SEEM PLEASED
WITH APPOINTMENT, ALTHOUGH SOME NERVOUS BUREAUCRATS FEAR
HIS NEW BROOM. KHULAYFAWI REPORTEDLY DISMAYED AT PERVASIVE-
NESS OF CORRUPTION HE HAS DISCOVERED. SYRIANS NOTE
CABINET CONTAINS TYPICAL MIX OF SENIOR BAATH PARTY
OFFICIALS AND YOUTHFUL TECHNOCRATS. END SUMMARY.
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2. DURING PERIOD OF LITTLE OVER ONE WEEK SINCE CABINET
OF PRIMIN KHULAYFAWI ANNOUNCED AUGUST 8 (REFTEL),
NEW PRIMIN HAS MOVED TO DEMONSTRATE TO SARG BUREAUCRACY
AND SYRIAN PUBLIC THAT BUSINESS AS USUAL WILL NO LONGER

BE TOLERATED IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS. KHULAYFAWI HAS MET WITH SENIOR OFFICIAL OF MOST SARG MINISTRIES IN PRESENCE OF THE PARTICULAR DEPRIMIN EXERCISING SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITY FOR PERFORMANCE OF A GIVEN MINISTRY; WITH LEADERSHIP OF POPULAR ORGANIZATIONS INCLUDING WOMEN'S FEDERATION, PEASANTS' UNION, AND OTHERS; AND WITH JORDANIAN AND LEBANESE OFFICIALS. PRIMIN EVEN TOOK TIME TO GIVE RECEPTION FOR THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS AND THEIR WIVES.

3. AUGUST 16 PRESS REPORTED GROUPS OF CIVIL SERVANTS AND BAATHIST VOLUNTEERS FANNED OUT PREVIOUS DAY TO BEGIN VISITING ALL 415 DAMASCUS BAKERIES ON THREE-DAY FACT-FINDING STUDY TO PREPARE FOR IMPROVEMENTS IN BREAD DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM. ARTICLE NOTED THIS ACTION RESULTED FROM PRESIDENTIAL DIRECTIVE TO CABINET TO DEAL WITH CITIZEN GRIEVANCES PROMPTLY AND ENERGETICALLY.

4. SYRIANS WE HAVE TALKED WITH SINCE CABINET LIST ANNOUNCED HAVE RESPONDED POSITIVELY TO NEW TEAM. MANY ARE STRUCK BY YOUTHFULNESS OF SEVERAL NEW MINISTERS; OF THOSE FOR WHOM BIRTH DATA AVAILABLE, AVERAGE AGE IS 41; MINISTER OF STATE FOR PLANNING IS ONLY 34, AND MINISTER OF PETROLEUM, 35. IT HAS BEEN NOTED THAT BAATH PARTY HAD RETAINED CONTROL OF SENIOR CABINET POSTS--PRIMIN AND THREE DEPRIMIN POSITIONS--WHILE ASSENTING TO PLACEMENT OF MORE TECHNOCRATS AT MINISTRIES. ANOTHER BUSINESSMAN CLAIMED THAT APPOINTMENT OF TWO CATHOLIC MINISTERS INTENDED AS POSITIVE SIGNAL TO LEBANESE MARONITE LEADERSHIP.

5. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBERS;

A. PRIMIN KHULAYFAWI-KHULAYFAWI'S APPOINTMENT HAS CLEARLY SENT TREMORS THROUGH TOP LEVELS OF SARG BUREAUCRACY, OWING TO HIS REPUTATION FOR PERSONAL INTEGRITY AND CONFIDENTIAL

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NO-NONSENSE PERFORMANCE DEMANDED FROM SUBORDINATES. SYRIAN BUSINESSMAN, DESCRIBING HIS MEETINGS WITH FOUR SEPARATE SARG DIRECTORS GENERAL THE DAY AFTER KHULAYFAWI APPOINTMENT, SAID ONE WAS PALE AND SHAKEN, UNABLE TO ACCEPT CIGARETTE; SECOND OFFERED TO RENT OUT HIS VILLA IN NEARBY RESORT, EXPLAINING THAT IT "TOO LUXURIOUS" FOR CIVIL SERVANT; THIRD SAID HE UNABLE TO EAT PROPERLY; FOURTH RECALLED PREVIOUS RUN-IN WITH KHULAYFAWI DURING PRIMIN'S EARLIER TERM OF OFFICE (DIRGEN HAD BEEN FACTORY MANAGER AND WAS JAILED BY PRIMIN WHO DURING UNANNOUNCED LIGHTENING TOUR OF FACTORY DISCOVERED REFUSE IN CORNERS AND OTHER SIGNS OF SLOPPINESS).

FROM VETERAN BAATHIST CLOSE TO NEW PRIMIN WE HAVE

OBTAINED GLIMPSE OF KHULAYFAWI'S VIEW OF BUREAUCRACY FOR WHICH HE NOW RESPONSIBLE. THIS SOURCE PASSED WORD THAT DURING PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH PRIMIN LATTER VENTD HIS DISQUIET AT IMMESNITY OF TASK CONFRONTING HIM. SOURCE SAID KHULAYFAWI DEEPLY DISTURBED OVER SPREAD OF CORRUPTION, TERMING IT "CANER" WHICH HAS BECOME SO PERVASIVE THAT IT BEYOND CAPAIBLITY OF ANY ONE MAN TO ROOT OUT. KHULAYFAWI EVEN DOUBTED HE WOULD BE ABLE TO HALT ITS SPREAD. (NOTE: PRIMIN HAS NOT PERMITTED THESE DOUBTS TOS SEEP OUT TO OTHER COLLEAGUES AND, AS NOTED ABOVE, HE PROJECTS IMAGE OF DETERMINATION TO HALT BUREAUCRATIC DRIFT.)

KHULAYFAWI HAS PERSONALLY TOURED EVERY PAVILION AT DAMASCUS TRADE FAIR. AT AMERICAN PAVILION HE SPENT ENTIRE HOUR AND ON THE SPOT DIRECTED ACCOMPNAING MINISTER OF ECONOMY TO BUY VARIOUS MACHINES FOR GOVERNMENT USE. WE WERE STRUCK BY HIS ALERTNESS AND GENIALITY. HIS ONE SUBSTANTIVE COMMENT WAS EXPRESSION OF SURPRISE AT THE DIVERSITY OF AMERICAN AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT ON DISPLAY AND THE NUMBER OF COMPETING FIRMS EXHIBITING IN THAT FIELD.

B. JAMIL SHAYYA, DEPPRIMIN FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS-- AS REPRESENTATIVE OF NUMBER TWO DRUZE FAMILY IN SYRIA (SECOND ONLY TO ATRASH CLAN), SHAYYA'S APPOINTMENT MARKS ATTEMPT TO BRING DRUZE COMMUNITY CLOSER TO REGIME. SHAYYA HAS REPORTEDLY BEEN USED SEVERAL TIMES AS EMISSARY
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TO JUMBLATT AND HAS SUFFICIENT SOCIAL STATUS IN DRUZE HIERARCHY TO INTIMIDATE LATTER.

C. DR. MUHAMMAD IMADI, MINISTER OF ECONOMY--IMADI REPORTEDLY SLOTTED FOR DEPRIMIN FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS POSITION UNTIL IT DECIDED AT LAST MINUTE THAT ALL THREE DEPRIMINS MUST BE FROM BAATH PARTY LEADERSHIP. WITH SHAYYA'S LACK OF ECONOMIC CREDINTIALS, IMADI WILL ENJOY MORE DE FACTO POWER IN ECONOMIC FIELD THAN BEFORE.

D. BRIG. ADAAN DABBAGH, MINISTER OF INTERIOR--DABBAGH LOST ONE METER OF HIS INTESTINES DURING SURGERY LAST JUNE AND HIS HEALTH STILL WEAK. HE WILL PROBABLY NOT BE ALLOWED TO KEEP HIS FORMER HAT OF DIRECTOR OF INTERNAL SECURITY, PERHAPS BEING REPLACED BY CURRENT DIRECTOR OF AIR FORCE INTELLIGENCE BRIG. MUHAMMAD AL-KHULI. (THIS WOULD MARK DEPARTURE FROM PRACTICE OF APPOINTING SUMMI MUSLIM TO INTERNAL SECURITY POST.) FORMER INTERIOR MINISTER ALI ZAZA HAD REPUTATION FOR LAXITY, PERMITTING HIS SUB-ORDINATES TO SPEND MINIMAL TIME AT THEIR DESKS AND HIMSELF WASTING TIME SIGNING PASSPORTS RATHER THAN DELEGATING THIS ANTHORITY TO TRUSTED JUNIOR SYRIANS WE IN TOUCH WITH APPEAR CERTAIN DABBAGH WILL OPERATE MORE STRICT

REGIME AT MINISTRY. ONE KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVER EXPRESSED APPREHENSION THAT DABBAGH, WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS A "KILLER," WILL ENFORCE MORE BRUTAL SYSTEM OF INTERNAL SECURITY COUNTRY-WIDE.

E. ABD AL-KARIM ADI, MINISTER OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS--ADI MOVED WITH DISPATCH INTO HIS NEW JOB. ARRIVING AT FOREIGN MINISTRY DAY AFTER HIS APPOINTMENT, HE DISCOVERED THAT NO OFFICE READY FOR HIS USE AND AS FIRST DECISION TOOK OVER THAT OF DIRECTOR OF PROTOCOL. ACCORDING TO INFORMED SOURCES (INCLUDING MRS. KHADDAM), ADI WILL OVERSEE THE DAILY FUNCTIONING (SIC) OF THE MINISTRY AND IS NOT EXPECTED TO REPLACE THE PERIPATETIC FONMIN ON HIS CONSTANT FOREIGN TRAVELS.

F. DR. NAJAH AL-ATTAR, MINISTER OF CULTURE--DR. ATTAR IS WIFE OF DR. (COLONEL) AZMEH, DIRECTOR OF THE PRINCIPAL MILITARY HOSPITAL. SHE IS CONSIDERED A POLITICAL CONFIDENTIAL

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INDEPENDENT AND HAS ALWAYS USED HER MAIDEN NAME PROFESSIONALLY.

G. ISA DARWISH, MINISTER OF PETROLEUM--ACCORDING TO DEPMIN FOR PETROLEUM NABULSI, DARWISH BRINGS NO BACKGROUND IN PETROLEUM TO THE JOB. FROM ANOTHER SOURCE, WE UNDERSTAND THAT FORMER MINISTER OF PETROLEUM MUSTAFA WILL ASSUME JOB WITH OPEC IN KUWAIT. MUSTAFA LEFT OFFICE IN MIDST OF INVESTIGATION INTO ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION ON PART OF SOME MINISTRY OFFICIALS.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 15 SEP 1999
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT REFORM, PRIME MINISTER, CABINET, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 AUG 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976DAMASC05454
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Film Number: D760315-1125
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t197608103/baaaesbv.tel
Line Count: 198
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, TEXT ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 MAY 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <08 SEP 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRIMIN KHULAYFAWI MOVES QUICKLY TO TAKE CHARGE OF
TAGS: PINT, SY, (KHULAYFAWI)
To: STATE INFO AMMAN
BEIRUT
CAIRO
JIDDA
LONDON
TEL AVIV

USIA

DIA

Type: TE

Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006